

Snakes

Sequoia National Forest Giant Sequoia National Monument

This is information about a few of the most commonly encountered snakes on the Sequoia National Forest. Only one of the four listed here is venomous. Individual reactions to these snakes vary greatly among individuals. Understanding more about the benefits and behaviors of these different varieties of snakes can go a long way to helping to protect them as an important part of our shared environment.

Western Rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*)

DESCRIPTION: 5 ½ ft. The Western Rattlesnake is a common snake, native to the Sierran foothills. They usually come out of winter dormancy when the temperature reaches 70 degrees, which usually occurs around March. Hot direct sunlight will overheat and kill a rattlesnake within 15 minutes so the snake maintains its optimum body temperature by moving back and forth between shade and sun during hot months. At lower elevations, it may be active dawn, dusk, or at night.

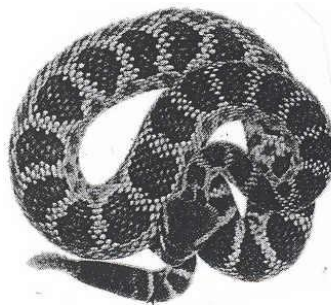
TOXIC FEATURE: Rattlesnake venom, a complex fluid containing toxins and enzymes, is produced in two modified salivary glands lying on each side of the snake's head behind the eyes. The venom is used primarily to obtain food. By the use of poison, the rattlesnake is able to kill animals that otherwise might be too large to eat. The snake strikes, injects venom, then withdraws from the victim in an instant. The prey does not die instantly, but instead runs before being disabled by the poison.

PREVENTION: Rattlesnake bites have caused human deaths; but because they are seldom encountered, particularly in the High Sierra, they are not a serious threat. It is still wise to gain knowledge of their habits and treat them with the respect that they deserve. Almost all rattlesnake bites can be prevented, as rattlesnakes are usually touched before they bite a human. Bites can be avoided by watching carefully where one walks, puts one's hands, or sits. Don't pick up any snake which has not been correctly identified and don't ever pick up a rattlesnake. Occasionally, people set out on killing a rattlesnake have been bitten when picking up a stick or weapon lying within striking distance of a coiled up snake. A wise person keeps a safe distance from rattlesnakes at all times. If you give the rattlesnake a chance to escape, it will.

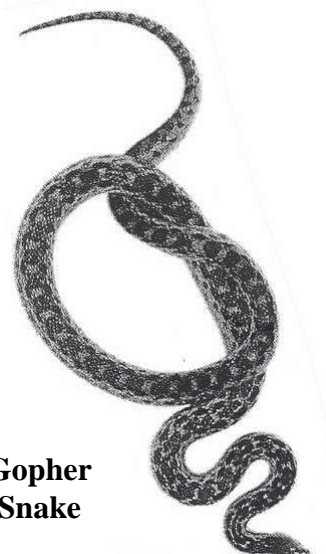
Gopher Snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus*)

DESCRIPTION: 6 ft. The aggressive attitude that the Gopher Snake has is merely to startle or frighten away an intruder, after which the snake makes haste for a safer spot. Gopher Snakes range in color from cream, yellow, green, gray or tan with large black, brown or reddish blotches on their back and smaller ones on their side. The Gopher Snake coloration and behavior are much like a rattlesnake's and the resemblance probably provides a degree of protection from predators. Sometimes in dry grass or leaves, its vibrating tail will produce a buzzing sound which, when combined with seeing a snake brings out the misidentification - rattlesnake!

HABITAT AND RANGE: Gopher Snakes are common throughout all 4 deserts of the American Southwest and beyond, up to 8,000 feet. They are found in a wide variety of habitats including desert flats, coastal dunes, and coniferous forests, but prefer grasslands and open brush areas.



**Western
Rattlesnake**



**Gopher
Snake**

Common Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*)

DESCRIPTION: 4 feet. The Garter Snake is black, gray, or dark brown with a distinct cream-colored stripe down the middle of the back. Their sides are usually blotched with red. Garter Snakes are also known as grass or garden snakes. They are very common in gardens and residential areas. They eat insects, as well as frogs, worms, and grubs. They are attracted to warm objects, and this gives them the heat they need for growth and digestion. To prevent snakes, remove debris, woodpiles and tall grass from your yard. Since Garter Snakes only burrow in loose soil, some hiding in places may be eliminated by packing sharp gravel and caulking around stoops and slabs. Remember that garter snakes are harmless to you and to your pets and should not be killed.

HABITAT AND RANGE: This snake is very common throughout North America. It is found in almost every habitat type including forests, marshes, bogs and prairies. It is often by water.

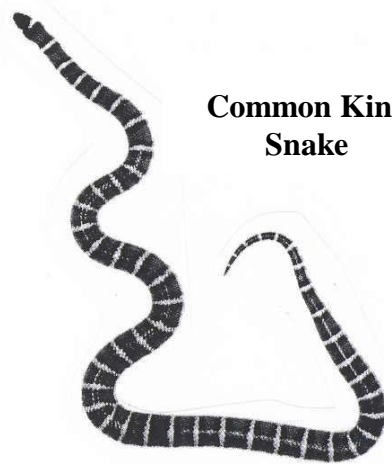


Common
Garter
Snake

Common King Snake (*Lampropeltis getulu*)

DESCRIPTION: 3-6 feet. The King snake is a large chocolate brown to black with a highly variable back and belly pattern. The light centered scales may form distinct cross bands, lengthwise stripes, blotches or speckles on the back. The belly ranges from plain white to heavily blotched with dark pigment to plain black. They are active during the day, especially early in the morning or near dusk, but become nocturnal in the warm summer months. The King snake is not venomous but it is a strong constrictor that eats snakes including Rattlesnakes, Copperheads and Coral snakes-as well as lizards, birds, mice, and eggs.

HABITAT AND RANGE: Their habitat is diverse and they can be found throughout the US from dry rocky wooded hillsides to river swamps and coastal marshes, also found in prairie, desert, and chaparral, from sea level to 7,000'. They range the length of the Sierra Foothills.



Common King
Snake



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